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National Museum of African American History and Culture

Pamphlet: Jim-Crow in Uniform

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a segregated freighter which was really a cattle boat to France. You remember, the Gold Star mothers, who were Negroes, went over in a cattle boat provided by Hoover, to see the graves of their dead sons.

Wasn't This a War for Democracy?

Thousands of sons of Negro mothers were also led to believe that joining the Army, fighting for Uncle Sam, would help to win them freedom. For after all, wasn't this a war for democracy?

It was no wonder then, that in 1917, when a NAACP editorial called for support of Negro Americans in the newly-declared war, that Negro America, as in the past, "closed ranks" in support of American democracy.

Stories of Jim-Crow treatment of Negro men in arms seep through even the most conservative journals. No matter what their qualifications, Negroes were given the most disagreeable jobs. Negro professionals were taken out of their ratings and given jobs as laborers, while white doctors were assigned to Negro troops.

Jim-Crow in Uniform

Did you know that Negro soldiers in uniform were stoned, jeered, and mobbed on the streets? The 8th Illinois, on way to Texas, suffered such treatment. When the 92nd Division, at Camp Funston, Texas, refused to recognize the Jim-Crow line at local theatres, the notorious Bulletin 35 was issued by the white commanding officer which read, *"Don't go where your presence is not desired. White men made the Division and they can break it just as easily if it becomes a troublemaker."*

It is a historical fact that in Houston, Texas, where the 24th Infantry was stationed, members of the provost guard had to endure the humiliation of going about their duties unarmed. Local white policemen disregarded their authority constantly. The famed "Houston Affair," which resulted in the killing of 18 persons, is another example of Jim-Crow in uniform. Court martial proceedings, which followed this incident, without War Department review, resulted in the hanging of

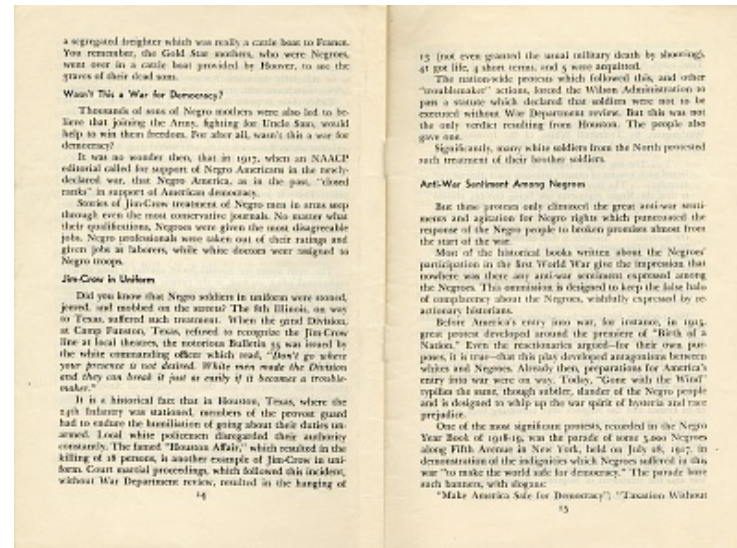
14

13
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13 (not even granted the usual military death by shooting), 41 got life, 4 short terms, and 5 were acquitted.

The nation-wide protests which followed this, and other "troublemaker" actions, forced the Wilson Administration to pass a statute which declared that soldiers were not to be executed without War Department review. But this was not the only verdict resulting from Houston. The people also gave one.

Significantly, many white soldiers from the North protested such



treatment of their brother soldiers.

[bold]Anti-War Sentiment Among Negroes [/bold]

But these protests only climaxed the great anti-war sentiments and agitation for Negro rights which punctuated the response of the Negro people to broken promises almost from the start of the war.

Most of the historical books written about the Negroes' participation in the first World War give the impression that nowhere was there any anti-war sentiment expressed among the Negroes. This omission is designed to keep the false halo of complacency about the Negroes, wishfully expressed by reactionary historians.

Before America's entry into war, for instance, in 1915, great protest developed around the premiere of "Birth of a Nation." Even the reactionaries argued--for their own purposes, it is true--that this play developed antagonisms between whites and Negroes. Already then, preparations for America's entry into war were on way. Today, "Gone with the Wind" typifies the same, though, subtler, slander of the Negro people and is designed to whip up the war spirit of hysteria and race prejudice.

One of the most significant protests, recorded in the Negro Year Book of 1918-19, was the parade of some 5,000 Negroes along Fifth Avenue in New York, held on July 18, 1917, in demonstration of the indignities which Negroes suffered in this war "to make the world safe for democracy." The parade bore such banners, with slogans:

"Make America Safe for Democracy"; "Taxation Without

15

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